

Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Sri Lanka

Overview: ISIS-inspired terrorists conducted a series of suicide attacks against churches and hotels across Sri Lanka on Easter Day, resulting in hundreds of casualties. Then ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi publicly praised the attacks, illustrating that ISIS remains determined, following its defeat in Syria and Iraq, to continue the fight from its global branches and networks and by inspiring attacks. The attacks led to isolated outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence, which the government made efforts to stop, though some observers deemed these efforts insufficient. Sri Lanka also conducted prosecutions against members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist insurgent group that fought the government for 26 years until its defeat in 2009.

Following the Easter attacks, Sri Lanka sought to improve its CT efforts by engaging the United States on improving border security and soliciting assistance for the Attorney General's office, which is charged with prosecuting the attack perpetrators. Sri Lanka is not a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, but participated as an observer at the Political Directors meeting in June. The country's secretary of defense and inspector general of police at the time of the April 21 attacks were both arrested for failing to act on available intelligence, which warned of pending attacks.

2019 Terrorist Incidents:

- On Easter Sunday, Sri Lankan citizens who pledged allegiance to ISIS detonated backpack suicide bombs in four hotels and three churches in the greater Colombo area and Batticaloa, killing more than 260 people, including five Americans.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Government of Sri Lanka continued to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), enacted in 1979 as a wartime measure, which gives the police broad powers to search, arrest, and detain individuals. After the Easter attacks, the government issued a four-month state of emergency, which also gave search, detain, and arrest powers to the military. More

than 1,000 individuals were arrested under the PTA in wake of the attacks, although just more than 100 remained in custody at year's end. A draft Counter Terrorism Act (CTA) set to repeal and replace the PTA remained under debate in parliament at year's end. According to international and domestic legal experts, the CTA would clarify the definition and punishment for terrorist activities and provide a current schedule of designated terrorist organizations. The first version of the schedule designated three domestic terrorist organizations, all of which had been connected to the Easter attacks. In August, parliament passed the "Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 2018 (MACMA)," which made a number of improvements to Sri Lanka's processing of mutual legal assistance requests, which could help in prosecuting terrorism cases.

The Special Task Force is a paramilitary unit of the Sri Lanka Police specializing in CT and counterinsurgency operations and charged with ensuring security of top government and foreign government officials, protecting sensitive targets, and suppressing activities that pose a threat to national security. Within the regular police structure, there is a Counter-Terrorism Investigation Division, which was moved under the Criminal Investigation Division in May. The police remained under the Ministry of Defense at year's end. The Easter attacks highlighted gaps in information sharing among Sri Lanka's security sector agencies. Reforms to address these issues were underway at year's end. Sri Lanka Police cooperated extensively with the FBI on the investigation into the Easter attacks. All suspects related to these attacks are currently in custody. Indictments for these attacks were pending at year's end.

Sri Lanka's border and maritime security remained vulnerable. The government is working with the UN, along with Japan, to enhance border management systems at Colombo's international airport. The Sri Lankan government also expanded its partnership with the United States to secure its maritime border. The U.S. Coast Guard, under the Department of State's EXBS (Export Control and Related Border Security) program, continued to train Sri Lankan Coast Guard and Navy personnel on maritime law enforcement and security operation, and the Government of Sri Lanka

continued to cooperate with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Energy through the container security initiative, "Megaports Initiative." The U.S. Department of Defense continues regular engagements with the Sri Lankan Navy Special Boat Squadron and Fast Attack Flotilla to enhance maritime security through the expansion of vessel board, search, and seizure capabilities.

Sri Lanka concluded two major trials of terrorist attacks from the LTTE period. On January 10, the North Central Provincial High Court sentenced two former LTTE members to 185 years' rigorous imprisonment for shooting down a Sri Lankan Air Force plane in March 2000, which killed 37 people. On January 23, the Anuradhapura High Court sentenced two former LTTE members to 25 years' rigorous imprisonment for the murder of eight people, including an Army officer, in 2007. Throughout the year, police arrested several people who are alleged to have had ties to the LTTE for possession of weapons and ammunition.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Sri Lanka belongs to APG, a FATF-style regional body. Sri Lanka's FIU is a member of the Egmont Group. In October, FATF removed Sri Lanka from its grey list after Sri Lanka completed an action plan to address the strategic deficiencies in its AML/CFT system.

Countering Violent Extremism: Following the April attacks, the Sri Lankan government established a new office under the Ministry of Defense to create new CVE policies to counter violent extremism. Discussions of education reforms and other measures were underway at year's end.

International and Regional Cooperation: Sri Lanka has actively sought assistance on CT issues from the United Nations after the attacks, as well as from key donor countries. The EU, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and India have all pledged CT assistance – with India offering \$50 million to the newly-elected Rajapaksa administration. Sri Lanka is a partner nation in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.